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SUBJECT: TRIP REPORT: SELF-HELP SITE VISITS TO OUTER DISTRICTS

1. (U) Summary: Pol/Econ officer and Self-Help Clerk (SHC) traveled to the Southern districts of Dikhil and Ali Sabieh, May 16 and 17 and to the Northern districts of Tadjourah and Obock, June 1, 2 and 3 to visit FY02 and FY03 projects for follow-up and close-out visits, as well as initial visits for FY04 proposed projects. Both trips were highly productive and fairly well received by the different communities. The following is a detailed trip report for both trips. End Summary.

ALI SABIEH

2. (U) Ali Sabieh is one of Djibouti's smaller districts, situated southeast of Djibouti City bordering both Somalia and Ethiopia. The town of Ali Sabieh lies just off the main trucking route into Ethiopia. The district is home to the three refugee camps presently operating in Djibouti - Ali Adde, Holhol and Aour Aoussa. The population of the district engages mainly in farming and herding of small livestock, though unemployment is a large problem for those in the main town. This trend was very apparent in all of the districts visited. The region is in the higher elevations giving it cooler temperatures than the lowland desert climates of Djibouti City and the large middle portion of the country. However, it still has the same arid landscape prevalent throughout Djibouti and water, as usual, is a primary concern. For these reasons the Self-Help projects chosen in the Ali Sabieh district are especially vital to the livelihood of the communities. From FY02 and FY03 Self-Help funds, Embassy Djibouti was able to fund three projects focusing on water, farming and a sewing workshop for unemployed women.

3. (U) In the small village of Dourreh, about 45 minutes drive from Ali Adde, the community requested Self-Help funds to reinforce and renovate existing wells, assist farmers in purchasing tools and equipment, and conduct training on soil and water conservation. The two wells visited had been reinforced to provide greater protection from the erosion caused by rains flowing through the Oued.

4. (U) The area immediately surrounding the Ali Adde refugee camp is one that has very few sources for potable water. Currently, the villagers have to use the well inside the camp because it is the closest source to the town. The community proposed building a well at another watering hole nearby to the majority of herders and farmers, however this site was claimed by the government so finding a new site was necessary. The watering hole also happens to be located on the edge of the Oued, which would have inevitably meant that a flood could ruin the well completely. This project is still underway, but the association has chosen a new site in a more secure spot along the Oued and has addressed the issue of counteracting erosion from the rains. Once completed, it will provide a great service to the local population.

5. (U) In the town of Ali Sabieh many women are without jobs, as well as many men. The local women's association, which is one of the most active in the community, proposed a sewing workshop to train the young girls and women of the town. The association uses a building in the old Catholic center that is no longer in use as a place where the women can come to work and display their products. The sale of the products goes partially to the seamstress and partially to continuing the sewing workshop. This association also has used a loan from the Fonds Djiboutienne de Development (Djiboutian Development Fund) to start its own microcredit service to help local women get their own businesses and ventures started. The association started with a loan benefiting 20 women participating in the microcredit service and has been able to pay back the initial loan in full and expand the service to benefit 45 women.

6. (U) Meetings with the town's various associations showed many needs, but a distinct lack of coordination among the different groups. Three different groups expressed the need for youth sports venues and several

mentioned the need for computer training and access. One group had purchased computers but couldn't pay for the utilities necessary to run an information center, though if the group housed the computers at the town's Centre de Development Communautaire (CDC) it could have benefited from the government paid electricity. Community leaders expressed some doubts about the program, reflecting on the lack of coordination and knowledge of the program throughout the community in past years. Pol/Econ and Self-Help Clerk (SHC) addressed their concerns and highlighted the need for a better coordination, not only among associations but between the community and the Embassy. Pol/Econ emphasized that in past years there may not have been a lot of interaction with the communities, but that the reason for this trip was to begin building a relationship with the community.

DIKHIL

17. (U) Neighboring the district of Ali Sabieh is the largest district in the country, Dikhil. Dikhil's borders extend from the Ethiopian/Djiboutian border to the Gulf of Tadjourah. Covering the mid-section of Djibouti, the climate is hotter and more arid than that of Ali Sabieh lending to many of the same concerns in the communities and in the main towns. As in the other districts, wherever there is a slightly cooler climate and some vegetation nomadic herders and farmers can be found. It is no different in Dikhil. The highest levels of traffic to Ethiopia also have to pass through Dikhil. This puts a heavy burden on the District's roads, which in some areas are becoming more rough, narrow and dangerous at night as more trucks travel them. As in Ali Sabieh, Dikhil has not been very active in the Self-Help program in the past years and many of the same concerns were raised. In FY02 and FY03, Embassy Self-Help funds were able to provide the materials for three projects to their individual communities. The rehabilitation of a youth center, a soccer field, and a sewing center that was recently inaugurated by the Ambassador.

18. (U) Many of the towns in the Dikhil district are either isolated and far removed from the main roads, or centered entirely on catering to the trucking industry. For these communities, the youth is a major emphasis. It is no surprise that alternative activities for youth are a major emphasis when the 50 percent unemployment rate is put next to the age ratios. Forty-three percent of all Djiboutians are under the age of 14 and the median age of the entire population is eighteen. Yoboki is one of Dikhil's towns that has the major trucking route going through the center of town. The community youth association proposed the creation of a soccer field to provide the youth of the area an alternative to the vices that can sometimes come through with the trucking industry.

19. (U) In stark contrast to Yoboki, As Eyla is so far from the main road that a local guide was needed to find the town. The heavy rains in April had made it inaccessible, so several different roads were created to bypass the damaged parts. In the middle of the desert the community is well organized. The proposal from the community was to rehabilitate the town's youth center so that the large youth population would have some alternative to keep children from delinquency. The project was well ahead of schedule and once finished will provide the youth with a library, a gathering room and a place to study after school.

TADJOURAH

10. (U) Tadjourah is one of the larger districts in the country, located in the Northern part of the country with its borders extending from the Ethiopia to the coastline. Tadjourah's landscape is mostly mountainous and has a cooler climate than most of the other areas in the country but still suffers from very limited rainfalls. The coastal region of Tadjourah is able to support more vegetation than many areas in Djibouti, which also support several agricultural growers. There is a growing number of fishermen taking advantage of this abundant resource in the Gulf of Tadjourah. This industry is only recently developing because of less supportive cultural attitudes towards fishing.

11. (U) Tadjourah is by far the most active district in the Self-Help program, having a total of ten projects over FY02 and FY03. The community leaders consistently submit a greater number of proposals than the other outlying districts. Most of the projects focus on water resources in hard to reach areas, though the town of Tadjourah has a diverse range of projects to counter the unemployment problem. Within the town limits of Tadjourah, the Self-Help program has funded a

library/reading room for youth, equipment for a vocational school, and a computer workshop. The Cardin Vocational School, run by the Catholic church, was in the midst of final exams when Pol/Econ and SHC visited. The work coming out of these classes was very well done. The center can accommodate 16 students for each three-year program and has lodging for the students that come from far out of town. The vocational school teaches four disciplines: electricity, mechanics, carpentry and masonry. Skilled workers in each of these areas are in short supply throughout Djibouti.

12. (U) Site visits to the more remote projects involve steep, rocky, twisting dirt roads that at times do not look wide enough for a single vehicle. The village of Ardo is at the base of the mountain that Bankouale, one of Djibouti's remote tourist sites, sits on. The women of the village rely heavily on the sale of their crafts to passing tourists. The community's proposed craft center located at the entrance of the village was about half-way through construction and proceeding well. The community will use this center to house the villagers crafts and have the women take turns running the center and baking for passers-by.

13. (U) Not so far from Ardo and Bankouale are the hilltop towns of Assaya and Saoub. Water projects were proposed for each of these villages. In Assaya, the dam that was proposed has been completed and has already proved effective. The community constructed a dam to block silt from filling the natural watering hole and deepened the hole. The last rains stayed in the watering hole for 23 days, a drastic improvement from before. In Saoub, the project to create two cisterns to collect rainwater had been completed, though the second cistern was destroyed in the last stages of construction by the floods in early April. The first cistern was dry when visited, but had held water for sometime after the floods.

OBOCK

14. (U) Obock neighbors the district of Tadjourah and covers the most of Djibouti's Northern coastline. Obock is even more arid than Tadjourah and is much more desolate. Once the capital of Djibouti, the town of Obock was one of the most badly damaged cities during the civil war in the early nineties. This may contribute to the feeling that the city and district has been forgotten by the government and many NGOs. Obock has not been very active in recent years, according to one association leader because the government and NGOs come and do not follow through on their promises. The leader added that the town has given up on outside help. Pol/Econ and SHC emphasized that this was precisely the reason Self-Help would be productive in Obock. SHC emphasized that there were two projects already underway in Obock from FY03, both focusing on developing farming and agriculture. Pol/Econ and SHC were able to visit one of the completed projects, which has seen some benefit but is experiencing slight problems with management of equipment. Pol/Econ and SHC advised the association sponsor on ways to improve the situation.

15. (SBU) COMMENT: Post feels the Self-Help program is making a significant impact on communities inside and outside of Djibouti City. The concept of associations and non-governmental civil society aid is new to the Djiboutian culture but seems to be firmly taking root. Proposals from larger towns like Tadjourah and Djibouti City are consistently dynamic, creative and address vital needs of the communities. Post believes that with the recent addition of staffing to the Pol/Econ section and the Self-Help program, it will be able to be more visible in the outlying regions. The lack of an American presence and the existence of only word-of-mouth knowledge of the Self-Help program seemed to be the most often mentioned shortcomings of the program. The success rate of projects in Djibouti seems fairly consistent and the program has had few serious issues arise over the course of project implementation. Post feels Self-Help has been and will continue to be a vital part Mission Djibouti's success. END COMMENT.

RAGSDALE